

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH MAJOR GENERAL RICK  
LYNCH,  
U.S. ARMY, COMMANDING GENERAL, MULTINATIONAL DIVISION CENTER, VIA  
TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ

SUBJECT: OPERATION MARNE THUNDERBOLT

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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): General Lynch,  
welcome to the Bloggers Roundtable. And let's see. Someone else just joined us  
here. Let me get them on line. Who's -- who just joined us?

Q It's William, Jack.

MR. HOLT: Okay, William. All right. Thanks. All right.

Okay. Major General Lynch, thank you for joining us here for the Bloggers  
Roundtable this morning. As we get started here, sir, do you have an opening  
statement for us, sir?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, I find I'm probably most helpful if I just give you  
some -- if I kind of shape the conversation. Then I can take it wherever you  
guys want.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Very well.

GEN. LYNCH: You know, MND -- in Multinational Division Center, you know,  
that I'm privileged to command, we've been there 10 months now. As you know, we  
came in as part of the surge to work the southern belts of Baghdad, the

Mahmudiyah qadha, the Madain qadha, and the southern provinces, Karbala, Najaf and Babil. And we also -- on the 20th of June, we picked up Wasat province on the Iranian border. So we deal with blocking Iranian influence as well.

When we got here 10 months ago, you know, we were having a difficult fight. We were averaging about 25 attacks per day. In the month of May, you know, we lost about 40 soldiers. Major combat operations.

What's happened over time now is, the number of attacks per day are averaging less than five a day. And of those five, probably only one is an effective attack which resulted in either a casualty or damage to equipment -- so significant reduction in attacks and, as a result of that, significant reduction in the casualties as well. In fact, there's been a 75 percent reduction in civilian casualties.

When General Odierno called me in January a year ago now, today -- you got to come in early and you got to block accelerants of violence into Baghdad, you got to defeat sectarian violence, and you got to secure the population -- you know, we spend a lot of time focused on securing the population, and just a(n) indication of that is the 75 percent reduction in civilian casualties.

So what I've been able to do as to the first of the year, under the corps change and order, I've been able to publish our new campaign plan -- we call it Marne Fortitude II -- which keeps us conscious of the security line of operation but allows me to have renewed emphasis on governance and economic development and transition. So we work to prioritize those and establish more effective governance at the local level, focus on the economic development, focus on job creation, focus on reconstruction, and at the same time maintain the security where it is now.

A perfect example is, every day at noon I get in my helicopter and I go out and about. I used to go and stay on patrol bases and plan major combat operations, and now I get out to the patrol base and then I get out and walk the streets. So today I walked the streets of Haswa, which is right on that Sunni-Shi'a fault line in the central corridor leading into Baghdad. And today I walked the streets, talked to the folks in the market.

I asked them, "What's on your mind?" None of them are worried about security. All of them are worried about services. "We need electricity, we need the sewage fixed, we need jobs." I met with about 20 of the local sheikhs and they echoed the same thing. They've organized themselves at the local level through a governing body, and they want me to help them with connectivity with the nahia government and the qadha government and the provincial government, and we're working that.

Even though we've got Marne Fortitude II going on now, we still have major combat operations. So I've got another division operation. This is our eighth in a series of named division combat operations. This is Marne Thunderbolt and it's in the southern portion of Arab Jabour. And you're seeing some of that play back home.

You know, it was an al Qaeda sanctuary in Arab Jabour. Earlier operations denied them the access into Baghdad, but it was really just the tip -- the northern tip of Arab Jabour, and now we're taking the rest of that area over by first shaping operations. We dropped 40,000 pounds of ordnance against 50 targets in about a 10-minute window. And these were all places where we had templated IEDs and weapons caches and safe houses and house-borne IEDs, and of

those 50 targets that we serviced, about half of them had significant secondary explosions, which shows you that there was something there. In fact, two of them were clearly deeply buried IEDs, which is our biggest threat with the Sunni extremists.

So what we're focused on now is, you know, capacity building, as I said, with Marne Fortitude II, continuous combat operations, like Marne Thunderbolt, and then working to establish a sustained security presence and bring Iraqi security forces into specific areas.

We've got 53 patrol bases in MND-C's area now. One of the things that we modified as part of the surge is we don't commute to work anymore. We have patrol bases that we establish based on combat operations. Then we stay there. And what happens is the local population come forward and they say, "Are you staying?" If the answer is yes, they ask, "How can I help?" And that's how we ended up with 31,000 concerned citizens in MND-C's area.

So it's about a sustained security presence. And we talk all the time about trying to establish irreversible momentum because we always have said that it's a tenuous situation right now with our current security situation, and it could go backwards. So to keep that from going backwards and keep this window of opportunity open, we're spending a lot of time working with the Iraqi security forces to improve their capacity and then do things like work on local governance and local economic development to maintain forward progress.

So with that, you know, it's probably prompted some questions or some things on you-all's mind that you want me talk about, and I'm happy to do that.

MR. HOLT: Very good, sir. Thank you very much.

And Richard Lowry, you were first on line. Why don't you get us started.

Q Good evening, sir. This is Richard Lowry with op-for.com. You're doing a great job out there. And I've noticed that on your Task Force Marne website, you have a message out that says you're going to start shifting focus to stability operations and reconstruction. I read an article about Madhiriya health care clinic that was opened. Do you have any other success stories that have recently happened?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah. Thanks for the question, Richard. Thanks for the feedback on the job, the great job my soldiers are doing.

What I've decided to do -- you know, I've got, it seems like, most of my adult life now invested in Iraq. What I decided to do is, rather than try to fix everything, we'd just fix some things. It's the starfish theory. It's the little kid on the beach throwing the starfish back in the water. The lady comes up and says, "What are you doing?" He says, "I'm saving starfish." He says, "Well, you can't save all of them. There's hundreds of starfish there." He picks up another one and throws it in the water and says, "I can save that one."

So what we've done is we've got about seven starfishes. Madhiriya clinic happened to be one of them. Another one is the town of Jurf As-Sakhr on the Euphrates River. I mean, 10 months ago, every time I went into Jurf As-Sakhr we got attacked on the way in and my soldiers were being attacked all the time. The only thing that separated my soldiers from the enemy was a T-wall, a retaining wall, and the enemy was lobbing grenades over the wall.

Now you walk the streets of Jurf As-Sakhr, there's 41 shops open; we've built the government center; we built the police station; the people there have come forward to secure their own area. Sheikh Sabah (sp), who's the lead concerned citizen out there, who was indeed in the past probably (colluding with ?) the insurgency, now is part of the solution, and Jurf As-Sakhr is another example.

Another example is the Iskandariyah industrial complex, which is smack-dab in the middle of my area. You know, it used to employ 36,000 people; now it employs 1,200. It's got a vo-tech that used to have a thousand students; now it's got 30. And we're working to turn that around. And I'm convinced over the next several months we can get buses rolling off the assembly line, we can get irrigation equipment rolling off the assembly line and continue to make progress there and get more people employed.

So there's just lots of examples like that, Richard, where we found something that wasn't right, our experience told us if we can fix this one, we can probably fix lots of things. So that's what we've been doing.

MR. HOLT: Andrew Lubin.

Q General, good afternoon. Andrew Lubin from Military Observer. I'm looking forward to coming over next week and spending some time with you in Arab Jabour.

Sir, with the concerned citizens in Arab Jabour and your hope for the (Gulf ?) area, with Marne Thunderbolt, are they hunkering down? Are they providing you (with help ?)? Or what kind of response have they had with that?

GEN. LYNCH: First, off hand, we're looking forward to seeing you and to spend time with the 130th Infantry. And that's going to be good for you and great for my soldiers to be able to spend some time with you.

What I'm finding with the concerned citizens -- they are indeed men of courage. I mean, I am convinced that what happened was they just got tired of the violence, they got tired of the intimidation, they got tired of being told what they had to do or what they couldn't do. So they've now risen up. And everywhere we're having combat operations, they're -- the concerned citizens are fighting tooth and nail. The only time that they're running away is when they got no ammunition left. But as long as they got ammunition and they got a place to fight from, they're fighting.

So you know, I'm very proud of what they're doing. They're taking losses just like the Iraqi security forces are and the -- and our coalition forces are as well. So they're not running away.

And it's amazing to me. I've got 31,000. They man about 1,400 checkpoints in our area. They have personally shown me where 400 weapons caches are. They've personally pointed out over 400 IEDs. And they've killed or captured over 500 insurgents themselves. And they've brought us, you know, five division high-value targets that we've been looking for, for 10 months, and the concerned citizens said, "Here he is."

Q (That's good ?).

GEN. LYNCH: It's going well. So that's where -- I've talked about it being tenuous. I mean, a good portion of our concerned citizens were probably

insurgents yesterday, and they could be insurgents tomorrow, and what we're doing right now is working hard to keep them on the right side of the fence.

Q (Off mike) -- sir. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: And Bruce McQuain.

Q Hey, General. Bruce McQuain with QandO. Last time you talked to us, you also mentioned the concerned local citizens. And one of your concerns at that time was integrating them into some sort of a more formal structure. Getting them paid, I guess, was -- is the best way of saying it. Any progress on that?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, there is, Bruce. I mean, that's a great question.

What I'm finding is, about a third of our concerned citizens -- they want to be Iraqi security force. So they want to be police or they want to be the Iraqi army, and we're working hard with the government to make that happen. We continue to generate lists of people who want to join the police and army, and then it's got a process it works through in the government of Iraq. But over time, I think, about a third of them will be policemen or members of the army.

The other two-thirds, we're working to find productive employment. So we've got this idea. You know, we call it a civil service corps, but it really is organizing the folks who used to be CLCs, who we no longer need now as security, and organizing them into some kind of productive formation that can, you know, meet the needs of the people. So they prepare roads. They fix bridges; they paint murals; they clean streets. They do that kind of stuff, but that's how we're keeping them productively employed.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir, thank you very much.

And Kim, Kim Kagan.

Q Hi, this is Kim Kagan from the Institute for the Study of War, [understandingwar.org](http://understandingwar.org).

And I'd like to talk to you about the enemy situation in your AO. Can you tell me, why or how do you think that the current operations, in Arab Jabour and elsewhere, will not simply drive the enemy further south, into some of the -- (inaudible) -- just below where you have your forces?

GEN. LYNCH: Well, that's a great question, Kimberly, and we're looking forward to seeing you when you come in at the end of the month as well. And thanks for all you and all your colleagues do.

What I'm seeing now is al Qaeda, who's been running as long as I've been here, about 10 months now, is running out of places to run. So for the Southern Arab Jabour fight, Marne Thunderbolt, what we did is establish blocking positions, in the southern portion of Arab Jabour, so that as they wanted to run, they had no place to run to. And the concerned citizens out there, they were telling us, you know, actionable human intelligence, like I told you.

You know, we bombed 50 targets in 10 minutes. A good portion of those targets were told us by the concerned citizens. We've got much more precise targeting now on the enemy, so he's doing a lot less running and a lot more dying or being captured.

But you know, there's still going to be some that work their way out of there, and you've got subsequent operations that you'll see when you come in that takes me to the next place where he's going and sitting. What we're doing though is, you know, when I got here, as I told you guys a long time ago, we had about four identified enemy sanctuaries. And our operations have allowed us to take those sanctuaries away from them. And what I'm doing now is, given an additional combat battalion -- I just picked up a new battalion out of the West -- 5-7 Cav -- I've now got combat forces to emplace on the ground in Southern Arab Jabour.

You know, we stopped a long time ago doing disrupt operations because all that did was harass the enemy, and then he came back after we stopped disrupting him. So he had to go do combat operations, take over the area and then stay there. So he's got much less places to run to.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And others joined us on the line. Who else is there?

Q Jarred Fishman's on.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Jarred. Go ahead.

Q Okay. Thank you for your time, sir. Could you talk a little bit about -- I know it's not exactly in this scope, but the de-Ba'athification law was just passed Saturday, because you mentioned obviously the tenuous nature. We have developments, but we want to make sure that there's irreversible momentum and perhaps a little bit to the human interactions you have with the Iraqis, both in the security forces, in the towns that you go to, the businessmen. Talk a little bit about, is there a psychology now of being able to work together with the central government, the nahiyas and the CLCs all together? Is there still problems or what is it that you actually see in your day-to-day travel?

GEN. LYNCH: No, thanks, Jarred, for that. What I find to be -- you know, the phrase is fingerspitzengefuehl, the German phrase for the feel of the battle, and now that myself and all of my subordinate commanders are off to patrol bases and out in the population, you have a really good sense of what's going out with the people. And today I was in Haswah, tomorrow I'm in Zayuna, the next day I'm in Arab Jabour, but it's walking the streets and talking to the local nationals.

And what I'm seeing is there's this amazing identification as Iraqis and not as Sunni or Shi'as. I'm talking to the locals. You know, they say, hey, we're Iraqi, and rarely in the conversation do they talk about being Shi'a or Sunni. But today, you know, when I was in Haswah, that's about a 60-40 split, so half of them were Shi'a, half of them were Sunni. None of them talked about that. All of them talked about being Iraqi and doing the right things for the people in their areas, so I'm seeing a lot of that.

And I am seeing, you know, these concerned citizen groups -- you take the 31,000, they break in to about 150 groups. Of those groups, you know, 60 percent are Sunni only, 20 percent are Shi'a only and 20 percent are mixed Sunni and Shi'a, and what's happened at the local level is they're just working it out. They're developing governing councils that are made of men from both sects to try to carry this ball forward. Now I don't spend a lot of time thinking

about what's going on at the national level and I really can't give you much insights on that, but at the local level what I'm seeing is the Sunni and the Shi'a population merging and identifying themselves as Iraqi.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Who else joined us?

OPERATOR: Chuck Simmons.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Chuck.

Q General, hi. Chuck Simmons from Americas North Shore Journal. I wanted to ask about provisioning the CLCs. We've been hearing that they bring their own weapons and we provide basically an identifying device.

Yet within the last couple days I've seen a report from a company- level officer (floated ?) in -- I believe it was in The New York Times -- indicating that we were providing weapons to them. Just what kind of provisions do we provide the CLCs? And do we construct their checkpoints for them?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, no, a great question. You know, they're part of the security infrastructure here in Iraq. We talk about thickening the lines, and you thicken the lines with Iraqi security forces, coalition forces and concerned citizens. So what I refuse to do is allow the concerned citizens to be out there and be poorly equipped. So we pay them about \$300 a month, which is about 75 percent of what an Iraqi policeman would make, and we pay them via these infrastructure security contracts. And the tribal sheikh, who normally is the concerned citizen leader, uses that money to pay salaries and use(s) that money to buy some equipment that he might need for his concerned citizen group.

We are indeed improving their checkpoints. We're trying to make our concerned citizens more survivable, based on force protection. They are indeed - - as you say, they're all marked. What's the -- the advantage of concerned citizen program -- it really was a military-age male census, because everybody has to be fingerprinted and retinal- scanned before he's a concerned citizen. So we know where he lives, we know his cell phone number, we know his fingerprints, and we know his -- we took a retinal scan.

We are indeed providing them communication equipment so they can talk to each other and talk to us. In some areas I'm providing them vehicles so they can move around the battlefield. But in no instances are we giving them weapons or ammunition. That's a red line we can't cross. That's a red line that the government of Iraq has established. And nowhere in my battlespace have we given them weapons or ammunition.

Having said that, you know, we're giving them money, and they could be using that money to buy themselves more ammunition or buy themselves different weapons. They're only allowed to carry personal weapons, AK-47s. And we've got all their serial numbers recorded. So they're not worrying -- they don't have crew-served weapons. They don't have major weapons systems. But we're not giving them any weapons or ammunition.

But I'm giving them uniforms. I'm giving them reflective vests, so we can identify them. We're helping them on their checkpoints. We're giving them comm. equipment and, like you say, some transportation.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Anyone else?

Q Yeah. General Lynch, it's Bill Roggio from The Long War Journal.

Just wanted to say, when I was in your AO last September, every officer I ran into said no, absolutely not; you're not arming the CLCs. So I can attest to that one. I think there's a lot of confusion on that issue because we pay them. But that's just what reporters do.

I have a quick question on the Iraqi army in the Arab Jabour region. Last September, it seemed that most of the battalions were out in -- towards -- in the western areas, Mahmudiyah region, whereas the Arab Jabour region only had one battalion of Iraqi army soldiers, and the commanders there were all looking for more Iraqi army troops. Has this situation improved in the Arab Jabour and eastern region?

GEN. LYNCH: Nope. No, it hasn't, Bill. And you know, we're still working with the Baghdad Operational Command, General Abboud, and trying to get more than just that single battalion -- right now just 546, one battalion out of the 4th Brigade of the 6th Iraqi Army Division. But promises have been made by the Iraqi security forces to invest more Iraqi army units there. So you know, essentially I've got three combat battalions, U.S. battalions, and one Iraqi battalion fighting the Arab Jabour fight. But over time, they promised to invest another brigade in Arab Jabour. So I can see, you know, doubling or tripling the size of the Iraqi army over the course of the next six months, you know, given the promise that they made. But right now, it's the same as what you saw when you were out here in September.

Q Is there -- are they planning on adding a unit from elsewhere, or are they looking to raise a brigade of forces? And if so, any chance that some of those CLCs will be incorporated into the brigade?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, that's a great question. You know, the plan that I've seen from the Iraqi army is a combination of both repositioning some forces in Arab Jabour from elsewhere and, as part of their ongoing force generation, creating new battalions to put out there.

And the CLCs that we're dealing with, most of them want to be police. Like I say, only about a third of them will ever be Iraqi security forces because only about a third want to be, and only about a third meet the criteria in terms of literacy test and physical test. But CLCs prefer to be police because they want to be used locally. They don't want to be used nationally. So rarely do I run into CLCs that want to be in the army, but there's some of them out there.

Q One quick question here. Any consideration to creating like national guard- or reserve-type units that remain locals to alleviate this CLC problem, or do you just think that they're only focusing on police, making them either police or converting them over to say, you know, facility protection guards and things like that?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, I haven't heard any discussion about some kind of reserve army unit or national guard unit.

Q Okay.



GEN. LYNCH: But I've got to tell you, just like, you know, I'm from Hamilton, Ohio, and the folks who secure Hamilton, Ohio, are from Hamilton. That's what these people want to do, so I think there's great logic there. We've got more people who want to join the police than we currently have authority to hire.

It's late day over here, man, I'm sorry.

Q You guys work long hours, we understand.

MR. HOLT: All right, there.

Q Thank you, sir.

MR. HOLT: Any follow-up questions?

Q Bryant Jordan, military.com.

MR. HOLT: Yeah.

Q I joined you late. Thanks very much.

General, what's your level of confidence that these concerned citizens will continue to support the Iraqi government once the enemy they're currently fighting have been defeated or dispersed?

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, you know, I deal with these guys all the time. I don't know if you caught it, but there's about 150 concerned citizen groups, and I've spent a lot of time talking to their leadership. And they're -- one thing about Iraq, most of you can attest to personally, is this is an educated population. And a lot of those concerned citizens are engineers and master craftsmen and plumbers, and they really don't want to spend the rest of their lives standing on a checkpoint, you know, with a road guard vest. So they're more than happy to transition from the security line to doing something else.

So we're really spending a lot of time looking for sustained economic development and sustainable jobs. I've got to tell you, just in terms of what I do on a day to day basis, probably half my time is consumed with -- it's about the jobs. You know, I spent a year in Kosovo before I started working in Iraq. And in Kosovo, it was about all these unemployed people that were standing on corners. And since they had nothing else to do, they used to go out and get in trouble. And that's what we're experiencing here now, and we've just got to find productive employment for all these people.

Q Sounds like Jay Garner's original plan.

GEN. LYNCH: I'm sorry, I missed that.

Q I said, sounds like Jay Garner's original plan: Put the army to work.

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, I don't know about that. I do know we've got to find these people jobs. Of the 30 sheikhs I was with today in -- (word inaudible) -- you know, that's what they wanted to talk about, is how can we get these people work, you know? And that's what I'm thinking through.

Q Sir if you could talk a little bit about -- I know that last week was National Iraqi Police Day and Army Day, and there were some very interesting and good pictures about the professionalism of the new corps and the training. Perhaps you could talk a little bit more, instead of the CLCs, about the actual army and the special forces and the actual, you know, the military commanders that you deal with, and if there's been any type of increased professionalism and an increased capacity to deal with operations and TTPs and things like that.

GEN. LYNCH: Yeah, I'm proud of the Iraqi army. I deal with two Iraqi army division commanders. The 6th Iraqi Army Division commander is -- (name inaudible) -- and 8th Iraqi Army Division there is -- (name inaudible). And their subordinate brigade and battalion commanders I find to be generally competent, capable military professionals. And in large portions of our operations, the Iraqi army is in the lead, you know, where they are.

I just, last week, I was in a town called -- (word inaudible) -- with -- (name inaudible) -- who's the commander of the 2nd Brigade of the 8th Iraqi Army Division. And the conversation was all about how he can get more involved in the fight as we work our way into -- (inaudible) -- and future operations.

So from an Army perspective, man, I got to tell you, I mean, I've watched this now for -- (inaudible). The problem is there's just not enough of them. You know, in general terms, I need about seven more Iraqi army battalions in my area to have a sustained security presence. And that was the point about force generation and moving other battalions around.

On the police side, you know, we've got two national police brigades that I deal with. One of them is a superb brigade who came out of Numaniyah and was re-blued, and now they're doing exactly what I want them to do in Jisr Diyala. But in the south, in Salman Pak, I got a national police brigade that is a Shi'a brigade, it's in a Sunni area, and we're struggling with that brigade. But we're working to give them more capability and working with the Iraqi security forces. They're realigning some battle space.

And then from the police, the local police, it's a mixed bag. In some areas -- like I was today in Haswa. I'm very proud of the local police. And there were 225 Iraqi policemen on patrol in the city of Haswa. There's other areas where the police are doing bad things or where there's no police at all. So it's really a mixed bag. There's no -- there's no uniform answer to that question.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

Well, as we're running short of time here, sir, General Lynch, do you have any closing thoughts for us, closing comments?

GEN. LYNCH: Well, first off, thanks for all that you do. I mean, it's important that the American public understand what their Army and their services are doing over here.

And, you know, this is 10 months into this deployment. I had a year here with General Casey. So I've seen a lot of this over the last several years, and I never have been more optimistic, but at the same time, I'm still very realistic, how this good could backwards.

I was here when the Golden Mosque blew up in February 2006. And the enemy's still out there and he's still got a vote, and he could still conduct a

catastrophic attack. And we're all very sensitive to that. That's why, as General Petraeus says all the time, nobody over here is dancing in the end zones.

You know, I'm always talking about we haven't defeated the enemy. We're looking for him, we're finding him, we're killing or capturing him, but he's still out there. So I'd ask everybody just to be sensitive of that.

But again, thanks for all you do.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much, sir.

Q Thank you, sir.

MR. HOLT: General Rick Lynch, commanding general, Multinational Division Center, thanks for being with us on the Bloggers Roundtable today.

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